

Health Hazard Evaluation of Deepwater Horizon Response Workers

On May 28, 2010, BP requested a health hazard evaluation of Deepwater Horizon Response workers. The fifth in a series of interim reports from this health hazard evaluation was issued August 26, 2010. In this fifth interim report, NIOSH presents the findings of the evaluations of wildlife cleaning and rehabilitation centers.

NIOSH investigators were organized in teams, with one investigator typically focused on exposure assessment and site characterization and the other focused on assessing health symptoms among the workers at sites in Louisiana (Fort Jackson and Grand Isle), Alabama (Theodore), Florida (Pensacola), and Mississippi (Gulfport). In these evaluations NIOSH found that:

- The five work sites visited for this evaluation all had programs in place to reduce potential occupational hazards in wildlife cleaning work.
- Wildlife cleaning and rehabilitation workers had several types of occupational health concerns. Some were unique to wildlife cleaning and rehabilitation work and some were common to other types of on-shore response work.
- Fifty-four workers completed a health survey. More injuries and symptoms were reported among workers performing wildlife cleaning than among a comparison group of workers. Among the wildlife cleaning workers, scrapes and cuts were reported by two-thirds, itchy or red skin or rash were reported by nearly one-half, and symptoms of headache or feeling faint, dizzy, or fatigued were both reported in more than one-third. Hand, shoulder, or back pain was reported by 39% of the wildlife cleaning workers.





- Although a specific etiology for the various injuries and symptoms is not possible to determine from this evaluation, a number of occupational exposures specific to wildlife cleaning work are likely important. The NIOSH investigators observed the potential for skin contact with several types of skin irritants including oil and oil-contaminated water. Scrapes and cuts reported among workers were likely related to handling of wildlife and various types of equipment. Workers frequently performed tasks requiring awkward and heavy lifting, potentially contributing to reported musculoskeletal symptoms.
- A potential occupational hazard for wildlife cleaning workers similar to that of concern for other Deepwater Horizon response workers includes heat stress from work in a hot and humid environment.
- Recommendations were made related to: (1) heat stress management, (2) work practices and personal protective equipment use to minimize potential for skin contact with oil, oil-contaminated water, and other potential skin irritants, (3) work practices and controls to minimize potential for musculoskeletal disorders and slips or falls, and (4) routine reporting of health concerns or injuries to supervisory staff or on-site safety representatives.

For these and other NIOSH health hazard evaluations, results may not reflect conditions on a continual basis.

To read the full Interim Report #5 and view updates on this health hazard evaluation visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/oilspillresponse/gulfspillhhe.html>.

